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# THE MAN JESUS

BY MARY AUSTIN

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## CHAPTER XI

SUPPOSE, now, this happened yesterday—that a man speaking as never man spoke before perished in our midst at the instigation of a few whose prejudices he crossed and whose profits he interrupted. And suddenly, to-day, all our social organization goes limping and awry for want of what he offered us. Should we have any difficulty then in seeing his work as Peter and James and John, as Andrew and Philip and Thomas, as Matthew and the rest of them, before they came under the influence of Paul, saw the work of Jesus, as incomplete, unperfected? Certainly not if we understood him as well as, with the help of all the centuries, we are able to understand the Man from Nazareth.

He came declaring the imminence of a state of society on which the will of God could be worked out freely, as it could not in the state to which he came, and he went still declaring it unestablished and confident that he should come again and heal the aching time. Some color his words must have lent to the belief that he should come with apocalyptic terrors and suddenness, for in the beginning there is no doubt that he thought of the world as being healed as he healed lepers, at a stroke. Later, he spoke of the growth of the new order as mysterious as the growth of a seed in the ground, and as natural. But however he spoke of it, the conviction was never far from his mind that love could not rule in Israel nor heaven be wholly come until great changes should be effected in the social organization. Of this the disciples were as convinced as we could be, and they lived, not as those to whom the Kingdom had come, but *ad interim*, until the day of its appearing. For all their enlightenment, they took the same attitude toward the second coming that the scribes and Pharisees took toward the first. They looked for it in the heavens, instead of springing lowly from the earth, as Jesus himself had come.

But if Jesus were to come to-morrow—or had already come in Rutgers Square or Hyde Park as simply and in much the same fashion as he came to Capernaum, and the constitution of the new social order were springing as a mustard seed, by what signs should we know it?

First of all, by its being established on the faith in Something Without Us, God, the Divine Mind, the Eternal Purpose, of the nature of which men are partakers as the son partakes of the father; and on the faith in Life as a progress toward the fulfillment of that purpose, proceeding best when most intelligently in touch with God the Father. This is the root and branch of that mind which was in Jesus, which must be dug deep into the social consciousness, and by no means is to be attained by plucking here and there a preferred saying from a casual bough. "Love your neighbor as yourself," he said; but in no shopkeeping fashion; meaning not "as much as yourself," but *as being yourself*, part of the undivided fabric of humanity. But before he said "Love your neighbor," he said, "Love God with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength"; submit yourself wholly to the Eternal Purpose, unfolding in the consciousness of men and discernible in the open face of history. Not only through the intelligence, perceiving that by the well-being or ill-being of a particular class all society is affected, but with a live throbbing, in a state of active sentience.

That Jesus thought of this state of social awareness as costing something to maintain, is plain enough, but also he thought of it as important to maintain at any cost. "If thine eye offend thee, pluck it out . . . and if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee." For with Jesus, good and evil were not thought of as being constituted in the general opinion, nor by conformity with the rules of any institution, nor even with a previous revelation, but only as they furthered or hindered that harmonious interrelation of God and Man which is the Kingdom of Heaven. Greeds of money and of the flesh, pride, anger and the natural affections, were to be cut off when and because they were impeding, when and because they stopped the individual from putting his particular case to the question of the whole; not as standing apart, wise and condescending, but as partaking of its wholeness. There is no single rule of living delivered by Jesus which cannot very shortly be shown to take its validity from the extent to which the item of conduct under consideration capacitates or incapacitates man for harmonious social activity. What he taught, what he desired for himself and his disciples, was a state of complete mobilization.

And if you say that this is not to be attained except by the practice of those phases of Christianity which are called mystical, let us understand once for all that Jesus came teaching, more than any other man, that the mystical is the practical. All these high states which had been the exclusive privilege of saints and prophets, he made part of the common use and possession. Mind, Spirit, whatever it is which flows between God and man and between man and his brother, he constituted the daily instrument, accessible alike to learned and unlearned. God is as free as air, and Heaven as close at hand in a fishing boat as in Jerusalem. He did a healing in the

course of an afternoon call, and forgave sins between the roast and the dessert. He made no more of a mystery of the stupendous forces of spiritual regeneration than of the springing of wheat in the field. He drew—though we have not yet accepted it at his hands—all the manifestations of the supernatural into the field of the natural. “Do me a miracle,” said the fat Herod when Jesus had been brought before him bound from Pilate; but Jesus did no miracles, nothing which he did not openly declare, and which we now know, to be commonly possible . . . the fulfillment of law. We are ourselves responsible for the hocus-pocus with which we have smothered those operations of the spirit which Jesus recommended as a means of obtaining the necessary ethical efficiency. We have used his name instead of his power, and prejudiced the whole vocabulary of spiritual vitality without being able to rid ourselves of the least of its realities. We speak of personal prayer in the phrases of auto-suggestion, and the work of healing in the jargon of therapeutics, and pay a handsome sum to confess our sins to a psycho-analyst who will blush to confess them freely to God.

It is for reasons like this that we remain, in an age of great enlightenment, in a state of immobility. The Spirit is still operative in the world, clarifying, revealing. Luthers still arise, and Lincolns. Many sincere souls offer us the true vision. The brotherhood of man is better understood and more widely applied than it was in the time of Jesus, who thought first of Israel and then of the little dogs under the table. Things are known and approved for the betterment of nations so that none dare deny them. But no mobilization of society can be effected toward the establishment of the Kingdom except in some manner by the use of the same means that Jesus practiced. At least nobody has yet done it.

For two thousand years we have launched ourselves on every conceivable experiment for sustaining the atmosphere of the Kingdom of God without its reality, only to find that none of them will work. We are at the end of all our shifts for creating heaven on earth by sleight of spirit. Puritanism and mysticism alike are but so many turns of the screw in directions which accomplish nothing toward the ultimate achievement. Communism will not do it, nor voluntary poverty, and charity has come to be looked upon as a positive deterrent. We have prophesied in his name, and in his name cast out devils of graft and corruption, and they have returned bringing seven others. We say, Lo here! and Lo there! and we have not yet learned that the Kingdom of Heaven is in the midst of us.

The Kingdom of Heaven is up to us. It consists very simply in casting ourselves, hand linked in hand, on the bosom of the Eternal Purpose, and not with psalm-saying and long countenance, but in a spirit of high adventure.

This is the meaning of all the work that Jesus did to free his

people of the need to do things because they had been a long time doing them. They did not always accept such freedom, but remained as an ox standing in the stall after the halter which bound him is loosed; but there is no doubt that he meant to show them that the only legitimate excuse for doing anything is that the Eternal Purpose is served by it. In such service lies freedom from tradition. Likewise in the operation of the spirit is release from the fret of illness, from the sense of lack and unfriendedness. Here and now, and not in some distant fruit of indirect political action, are the eternal verities. *If they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not . . . "for where two or three are gathered together . . . there am I."*

The predicament of society has been to express in terms of the more than two or three the clear call of Jesus to essential use, as against the arbitrary laws of social exigency. For men in nations must live in some degree by forms, and the followers of Jesus have not been able to deduce from his personal teaching the precise frame of economic or political organization conformable with the Kingdom. There wants still a prophet to cut through all the dead and dying traditions of social living as Jesus pruned the levitical formality of Hebraism. Lacking such a one, we do what we can with the pattern in hand.

It must appear very early that to the people sincerely bent on producing a society in which the will of God is manifest, the particular political form is of the least importance. There could not be very material differences between the procedures of a Christian king and a Christian president; but, monarchy or republic, the indispensable mark of Christian vitality is that the state should be fluent, able to move readily like a growing thing in the direction from whence the light cometh. Stated in terms of the social mass, the promise of Jesus that with God all things are possible, means no more or less than that, so moving in harmony with the Eternal Purpose, we arrive at undreamed-of possibilities. No political propaganda, then, which accepts a limitation for the race, or looks forward to any shape of social fixity, can nominate itself Christian. The Purpose, turning like a millwheel in the stream, works up every wave of it, flashing the last least drop in the sun.

The maintenance of such a mobile state is by no means so difficult as it appears, provided that the place of individuals in the state be established on grounds clearly defined by Jesus whenever in his ministry the subject came to his attention. It did so come on more than one occasion, and seems to have lain close to the minds of his disciples all the way from Cesarea-Philippi to Jerusalem. Who should be first in the Kingdom, who sit in the chief seats? This was the question, and the answer was always the same and unequivocal: "Who-soever will be chief among you, let him be your servant."

Now, after tradition, the thing which most tends to fixity of politi-

cal forms is privilege—privilege of lands and waters, privilege of first fruits and spoils of war, privilege of place and profit. For these men fight and intrigue, making kings and unmaking them. But service goes by capacity; it may neither be schemed for nor inherited. It arises in unexpected places—a carpenter's shop, a rail-splitter's cabin, and no man may so much as pass it on even to his son. Although service itself be reckoned a supreme privilege and guarded jealously, it at least cannot be farmed. "As the summer lightning cometh out of the east and shineth unto the west," so are the gifts by which society is served. In a State, then, whose chief citizens are accounted those who serve most, there can not be even a serving class, and fluency is maintained not by a series of head-on collisions with established privilege, but by pushing it aside as the tip of the growing plant pushes the sod.

From his handling of his disciples, from many parables, it is evident that Jesus never contemplated a society of mechanical equalities. But so far as he thought of rank and order he thought of them as arising from the natural endowment of men, and of men estimated in heaven as they served heaven and not themselves. But even as he made service the criterion of worth in the Kingdom of God, so he would certainly have decided against any economic device which would have straitened the individual capacity for serving. No procedure, whether it be an ill-nourished childhood or an insufficient wage, which leaves men lessened of their normal worth can be thought of as consistent with a Christian state. Loving God with all your soul and all your mind and all your strength was the Nazarene's way of putting our modern plea for efficiency in social service.

At first glance it would seem that he thought not at all of goods and their distribution, and, if he thought of them, left no witness. We have seen how the simple communism of the first church at Jerusalem grew rather out of the teaching of John the Baptist than of Jesus, and was not enjoined by them on other churches. It was like the common purse of the twelve on their pilgrimages, the outgrowth of a temporary common objective. On the night of the Passover, knowing their interests about to be scattered, Jesus bade each man take his own, and afterward we find them working their own boats in Gennesaret. Groping deeper, however, into the groundwork of his doctrine, we may without too much hesitancy strike out the main lines of a world organization harmonious with whatever else he taught in other departments of living.

There is no doubt that his sense of the brotherhood of man and sonship to the Father went somewhat deeper than our biological appreciation of kinship in the human family. He thought of us as "abiding" in it, inalienable, no more able to fall out of it than we can fall off the earth. Sin and sickness were schemes which temporarily discomfited us, but could in no wise nullify the obligation. Judas he received even after he had sold his master. All his han-

clings of the sick and the sinning were alike in as much as they made for wholeness, unifying and re-establishing the relation. In a Christian state there could be no such outcastings as we make of the criminal and the nonconformist. Thinking always of men as children of our Father, it is probable that he would have thought of our relation to the earth as being something more intimate than mere possessiveness. Certainly he would have conceived that *the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof* in a sense more imperative than our poetic appreciation makes it so. All early Hebrew law exhibited this profounder relation, and attempted to express it in ordinances many of which were still in force in his time. The Pharisaical fussiness which made it a Sabbath-breaking for Jesus and the twelve to thresh out the ripe grain between thumb and palm did not so much as question their right to eat of the fruit of the field and the orchard through which led their path. The certainty lying deep in Israel that somehow the last ears must not be gleaned, the last cluster gathered, nor the ox muzzled in treading out the corn—was it not somehow the far-derived root from which sprung this new revelation of the Fatherliness of God? One law they had which expresses their sense of the processes of organized society as a progress away from the indispensable relation. It was the law of the Sabbath of the land. Six years did they plow the field and prune the vineyard and gather the fruit thereof, but the seventh was a year of rest for the land. And after seven sevens of Sabbaths, in the day of atonement a trumpet sounded to hallow the fiftieth year and to *proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof*. And in this fiftieth year of jubilee they returned every man to his possession; and only according to the number of years from the jubilee could the land be bought or sold . . . for “*The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine. . . .*” And everyone who in that year had come into bondage because of poverty, should depart from his bondage and return unto his own. So, through a multiplicity of carefully devised provisions, Israel attempted from time to time to restore man and the land to their normal relation.

This was a part of that law which Jesus said he had come to fulfill; not merely to obey nor yet meticulously observe, but to exemplify in its profoundest implications. It is impossible not to think that, had the Man from Nazareth turned his attention directly to the re-establishment of a mode of social living, his first effort would have been to demonstrate the brotherhood of man in terms of his inheritance. It would have been consistent at every point for him to have denied permanent and exclusive possession of the property of the Father. He would have justified it as did Israel out of experience, and the faith that nothing which is in harmony with the natural constitution of society can work in any way other than to its betterment.

If this is not so much of a practical direction as some of us would

wish, it is at least more than has been yet accomplished. If it does not immediately produce the Kingdom, it bears out the good half of the announcement that it is "at hand"—that it lies, in its simplicity and in the immediacy of the instrument, "in the midst of us." It establishes the social revolution not as a thing to be accomplished, but as a thing experienced.

The teaching of Jesus which is most in men's mouths to-day is the brotherhood of man; but the conception most necessary to any realization of it in terms of human organization is recalled to us by the vision which burst upon him at the ford of Jordan, with the effect of the heavens being opened. . . . *This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased* . . . the sense of ourselves harmoniously related to the Purpose and important to it—used by it. In our day we have stretched out our hand to man, our brother: but to man as a spiritual orphan, unfathered. And we know of nothing more to do with the other hand than to wave a red flag with it, or use it to go through his pockets, according to our several dispositions. It is only when we have clasped God on the other side that the current of eternal possibility circulates through us. It was in such a faith that the whole power and personality of Jesus was suspended, as the stars are hung in the windless spaces. Such a revelation flashed upon Peter and James and John in the hour when the Messiahship of Jesus burned for them between the two candles of the law and the prophets. It is the tree from which brotherhood proceeds by a thousand fruiting branches.

For none of these things is so because Jesus taught them. Rather, the whole hope of ethical reorganization depends on our being able to be sure that he taught such things because, more than any man else, he perceived them to be true. To realize them in terms of human conduct it is not so important to establish the exact degree of the sonship of Jesus as to be able to know that relation for ourselves as the most poignant of human realities—whether indeed we are the stream proceeding from the source of Life, or midges dancing upon it. Twenty centuries have not produced the Kingdom out of an evangelical system of believing what somebody wrote down concerning what somebody reported that Jesus said. Comes now the untried experiment of establishing it in the things that Jesus believed.

He believed in man and in God the Father, friend of the soul of man. He believed in the future, but he believed also in the Here and Now. He believed that the ills of this world are curable while we are in the world by no other means than the spirit of Truth and Brotherhood working its lawful occasions among men.

This was that man approved of God whom Peter preached, standing in Solomon's porch opposite the Gate Beautiful, before Paul came interpreting the new experiences which Christianity brought in terms of an inherited conception. Thus they spoke of him while they



still thought of his death as originating in the cruelty and wickedness of the levitical party, before any one seems to have imagined that he died for our sins, or that in dying he contributed any more to the Kingdom than his life showed forth; before he began to be spoken of as God and Saviour; before the poor and simple learned to think of him in terms of the poor and simple, True Vine, Bread of Life, Good Shepherd. They thought of him as a man appointed for a certain task, sent by God, a Jew, not establishing a new religion, but clarifying and renewing the faith of their fathers, adding to their objective idea of sin as a violation of law, his subjective concept of it as a breach of at-one-ness with the Father. To Peter and the rest of them Christianity was a healing of this breach through faith in Jesus as the dead and alive again. This for them was the Kingdom, not the overthrow of one form by another but the flux of all forms: empires, pomps, societies; the redemption of life from the bondage of Things.

All this began to be changed very soon, almost in the lifetime of the apostles; but before the simple, earlier belief had become entangled in the ebullient new life of the church, it had been gathered up and kept for us as sacred relics are kept in silver altars. It had been embodied in a myth of such naïve and tender beauty that still, after twenty centuries, one touches it reverently, knowing that the world has not produced its like.

It is not always possible to trust the objective reports of men as unlettered and untrained of mind as were those who stood nearest to Jesus. Their wits move too close to the earth, sentiment and observation meet the intelligence with one indistinguishable impact. They report what they sense, rather than what they see and know, and its meaning is often limited by the limitation of their outlook. But in matters which come so close to the people as did the experiences of early Christianity, you can always trust their myth-making. For a myth is a report of the soul's essential traffic with the invisible forces, prefigured in human incident. Before all the actors in it had been gathered with those who slept, there began to be circulated a myth about the coming of Jesus which, as insects are held in amber, holds every vital element of the faith entertained by those most nearly touched by it. And just as the story which Jesus himself told of his struggle on the mountain was a long time arriving at a material interpretation, so the story which arose concerning the birth of Jesus was two or three centuries in passing from its purely spiritual significance to historical acceptance. By such acceptance it was preserved to us intact, to reveal to our time the profound and simple concept of the place of Jesus in human consideration.

It begins with an attempt to derive the descent of Jesus from all history, on the one hand, and on the other to present his sonship with God in terms with which the time was familiar. They were world-terms in the sense that no tribe at any time has found, for the glad

surrender of the race to divine use, a more expressive figure than the yielding of women to their supremest service. To be filled with the Spirit as the mother is filled with the hope of new being, this it is to be fruitful toward God, to produce the ultimate Brotherhood. In some such way all simple people have expressed it. The story told by Matthew and Luke goes further and exhibits the studious search of the scientific for the Truth, and their amazement to find it (is not this where all the wisdom of the schools has landed us?) with the ass and the lowing kine, a child in a manger. So far the story might have come out of any nation, but only one could have added the prophetic touch of truth, hid from the wise and revealed to near-by shepherds; or have seen, in the figure of Herod, all Privilege striking blind and large at the new birth which threatens it, slaying the innocent as in how many rages of Privilege it is slaughtered, while yet the eternal Hope escapes, fleeing into Egypt, nursed and husbanded by the people.

By such means, even while the descendents of Mary lived and the grandnephews of Jesus worked their Galilean farm, was the intimate teaching of Jesus kept in remembrance. Thus in the wrappings of twenty centuries is preserved to us the seed of the Kingdom that is not to be circumscribed by legislation, but must be entered into by personal determination. To some such knowledge of it we must return if we would see it advanced in our generation. For Christianity is not a system of theology, but a way of life in which the validity of your relation to God is witnessed in your relation to your neighbor.

THE END.